

THE FAR EAST NETWORK EXPANDS

Armed Forces Radio in Korea began after the end of World War II. when, FEN established station WVTP in Seoul for the American troops that landed to accept the Japanese surrender. FEN established other stations in Pusan, Chonju, and later, Kwangju. Like the stations in Japan, the Korean outlets operated independently with no network broadcast connections. When American troops withdrew from Korea in 1948, Armed Forces Radio also pulled out. By the end of the year, all stations except for Seoul had signed off the air. On June 30, 1949, FEN transferred the Seoul station to the Korea Military Advisory Group, and WVTP ceased to be considered part of the Far East Network.

On June 25, 1950, North Korean forces crossed the 38th Parallel and attacked the South Korean capital. Immediately, WVTP began broadcasting evacuation instructions to American personnel. Before the North Korean capture of the city, the station moved to Taegu and then, on July 31, farther south to Pusan. As the Pusan perimeter shrank, the station went off the air and evacuated to Japan. FEN continued to broadcast programs during this period from its Fukuoka transmitter.

To cover the fighting itself, FEN sent a correspondent to the perimeter armed with a .45 automatic and a tape recorder. He joined the 24th Infantry Division's 19th Regiment north of Taejon. When Taejon fell to the North Koreans, the correspondent retreated to Tokyo, but after a week returned to the peninsula. There he joined the 1st Cavalry Division north of Taegu with whom he remained until he was wounded and evacuated to Japan. His vivid memories accented his broadcast reports. One time, he recalled, "I looked out of the courtyard and saw some tanks approaching. Jubilantly, I said to a soldier next to me, 'Here come our tanks!' He stared at me matter-of-factly. 'We ain't got no tanks.' was the laconic reply. I don't think I ever felt so lost!"

Back in Japan at General Headquarters, military commanders were planning for the Inchon landing. They decided that a permanent AFRS station should be reestablished in Seoul as soon as they recaptured the city. The command issued instructions to the Headquarters, Japan Logistical Command, to help acquire the needed equipment. Major Edgar Tidwell, FEN's executive officer, immediately began locating the equipment and obtaining

personnel from AFRS stations throughout Japan. By September 20, 1st Lieutenant Albert Jones, Officer in Charge of the new station, Francis X. Crosby, a civilian radio engineer, and seven enlisted men were in Yokohama. So, too, were an undetermined number of crates of equipment.

THE ARMED FORCES KOREAN NETWORK

On September 27, MacArthur's Headquarters issued General Order #84, which officially created AFKN. The next day, Crosby flew with Sergeant Allen Larkin and Corporal Lawrence Butcher into Kimpo Air Field. There, they'd seek to find a studio and make arrangements for the arrival of the equipment and staff. The rest of the staff left Yokohama on Sunday, October 1, flying first to Ashiya and then to Kimpo, arriving at 10 PM. From there they made their way into Seoul to the American Embassy, where Crosby located the original WVTP studio.

Although the retreating North Koreans exploded two bombs in the basement, the soundproofed studios survived in good condition. Typical of AFRS broadcasters, the nine men worked for forty-eight hours straight and got the station back on the air on October 4. Although they'd brought most of the equipment with them, small items, like screwdrivers, didn't arrive. Larkin recalled, "We used fingernail files, nail clippers, mess gear, and everything else imaginable to get things in operation. We made it, somehow!"

At 7:00 AM Wednesday morning, an American announced, "Good Morning, this is Armed Forces Radio in Seoul, broadcasting on 610-kilocycles. We now bring you the news..."

The station didn't stay on the air long. Crosby'd strung the antenna up the side of the eight-story Embassy building and across the street up a smoke stack atop a building 30-feet away. A Korean cleaning the top floor of the Embassy building threw some trash out the window, the antenna came down, and the station went off the air. Crosby went up the eight flights, fixed the antenna and the station went back on.

A few minutes later, a chair flew out one of the windows, and down went the antenna once more. Crosby fixed the antenna again, but when it happened a third time, he then resorted to more drastic means. He posted himself on the street with a carbine. A warning shot into the air finally convinced the Koreans that the area was not a public dump, and AFRS Seoul was on the air for good!(1)

From the beginning, AFRS Seoul broadcast twenty-one hours a day, three hours longer than the FEN stations. The extra programming came from a record request show "Rice Paddy Ranger," which ran from Midnight to 3:00 AM. With its own short-wave receiver, the station picked

up news broadcasts directly from AFRS Los Angeles and shortwave programs from Japan. Besides the news and sports, the station received the regular AFRS transcription package.

For their own music shows, the disc jockeys relied on the AFRS record library, which contained more than 100,000 musical selections ranging from country to classical to the top ten. The station also broadcast several of the popular FEN shows, including "Sports Parade" and "Four O'Clock Jamboree." (2)

Lieutenant Albert Jones relied on a staff of eight enlisted men and Francis Crosby, while Koreans who worked at WVTP during the occupation years did the maintenance chores. At first, the troops seemed hesitant to send in their requests, but within a month of going on the air, the station's mail had grown considerably. Their tastes were much the same as radio listeners all over the world. Popular music held the top spot, country music second, commercial network variety shows were third and mystery programs fourth. (3)

With its 250-watt transmitter, AFRS Seoul reached an audience within a 25-mile radius of the city. Programming for the rest of South Korea came from the FEN shortwave transmitter in Fukuoka. In the early days of the war, the network leased a 10,000-watt transmitter from the Japanese Broadcasting Corporation and beamed programs to the first American units thrown into battle. FEN soon moved one of its transmitters from Saga to Fukuoka and returned the leased transmitter to its owners. The new one was strong enough to be heard as far north as Taejon. Even the two stations together could not adequately cover all parts of Korea. More American and UN forces poured into the country and the Allies began moving north. (4)

AFRS UNDER THE BOMBS

Monitoring the course of the fighting from Japan, Major Tidwell built a mobile station modeled after those built during World War II. Roscoe Phillips found an old ordnance van in which he built a studio, including a BC-610 radio transmitter. When the technicians completed the station, dubbed "The Monster," they airlifted it to Kimpo. From there, they took it to Seoul to replace the Embassy studios. (5) Once again, AFRS' creativity in scrounging brought "a little bit of home" to the troops.

The makeshift station had a short stay. After driving UN forces out of North Korea, the Chinese and North Koreans moved back across the 38th parallel and toward the South Korean capital. As they entered the city's northern suburbs, the "Monster" roared out the southern end after signing off: "We don't know where we'll be next, and nobody else does either. That's why we're called the 'Kilroy' station." The mobile station moved

south with the UN forces and settled permanently in Taegu, where it became known as "Radio Kilroy."

By then, other stations on wheels were working in the field. AFKN became known as the "Network on Wheels."

As the UN forces began to move North again during the Spring of 1951, one of the vans advanced with the troops. Reaching Seoul in May, the staff transferred operations to a studio it set up in the Bando Hotel. The "permanent" facility lasted about two hours before gunfire and bomb forced the station back to its van! While the station stayed in the Seoul area, its initial experience in the capital produced its name, "Vagabond."

When the fighting moved beyond Seoul, another unit, nicknamed "Troubadour," operated north of the 38th parallel with the X Corps. In the Kumwha sector, AFKN established Radio "Gypsy," a most fitting name with the station continuously on the move. In June, 1951, it was at Chunchon; four months later, at Hwachan.

In the South, "Homesteader" began operations at Pusan on August 25 and became the only station to acquire a permanent home during the war.

Movement became the byword for the "Network on Wheels." Each of the mobile units had a 250-watt transmitter, a studio, program materials, AFRS transcriptions and the ability to put on occasional live shows. As the intensity of the war increased, AFKN placed more stations in the field. By November, 1952, "Rambler" was in the Chunchon area, "Nomad" was with I Corps and "Mercury" was on the Air Force base at Kunsan. All of them were providing the UN forces with entertainment, news and information.

Besides providing the regular programming, the stations also raised thousands of dollars for various charities. The "Vagabond" 24-hour drive for crippled Korean children, in September, 1952, was typical of the fund-raising marathons the local stations originated.

Contributions came from bunkers, tents and barracks. A group of Marines paid \$400 to hear the "Marine Hymn," another \$100 to keep the "Artillery Song" off the air. In turn, the artillery men quickly pledged \$155 for their song. The Army then paid to have "Anything You Can Do, I Can Do Better," "Baby Face," and "Too Young" dedicated to the Marines. The Leathernecks finally dedicated "I Surrender, Dear" to the Army, ending the rivalry.

The fund-raiser closed with "I'll be Glad When You're Dead, You Rascal You," which the station dedicated to the Communist General Nam Il.

Such shows generated that famous doughboy humor that has always existed side by side with the grim realities of combat. Yet, the AFKN outlets never lost sight of their wartime mission. One of the troops' favorite programs was "Mail From Home," which featured songs dedicated

to individual soldiers.

The sounds of combat at times intruded upon the live shows that the stations originated. A Christmas program, which "Radio Vagabond" recorded in December, 1952, featured the Wolfhound Regimental Choir and three chaplains addressing their congregations. Describing the recording session, the station's program director recalled, "We could hear the artillery in the background. I'll bet it's the only recording on earth of a chaplain wishing his men 'Peace on Earth' followed by a 60mm shell blast!"

AFKN covered the war itself with "News Front, Far East," in a joint venture with FEN. Reporters with portable tape recorders went wherever the fighting took place. They'd cover all phases of the conflict - a mile behind enemy lines on a combat patrol and over enemy targets in Air Force planes. They even covered such major operations as "Trojan Horse," which pushed thousands of Communist troops out of position during the winter of 1951-52. Coverage also included VIP visits, the armistice talks, prisoner exchanges, and finally, the truce agreement itself.

FIRST STATION ON A MARINE BASE

As time passed, the network continued to grow. They added "Radio Meteor" in 1953, the first station to be located on a Marine base in Korea. It served the First Marine Air Wing at Pohang. "Meteor" was the ninth station in the network, of which seven operated from mobile units and two broadcast from permanent facilities. Given the multinational nature of the United Nations Command, the AFKN stations had a varied audience. They tried to provide service to all. Newscasts and disc jockey shows were broadcast in French, Dutch, Korean, Flemish, Turkish, Greek, two dialects of Spanish. There were actually two versions of English. One was for the Americans and one for the Commonwealth troops of Great Britain, Canada, New Zealand and Australia.

Following the Armistice on July 27, 1953, AFKN went through a period of transition from the "Network on Wheels" to permanently established stations. In April, 1954, "Vagabond" opened permanent studios on Vagabond Hill in Seoul. "Radio Comet" went on the air in July, 1954, with studios at Osan Air Force Base. AFKN inactivated "Meteor," "Nomad," "Rambler" and "Troubadour." "Radio Gypsy" moved to Camp St. Barbara in Kuma-ri.

FEN worked closely with AFKN, providing logistical support, equipment and programming. All newscasts came from FEN, Tokyo to each AFKN station via short-wave. In 1956, FEN Headquarters established the first teletype service to AFKN, Seoul. Using the combined resources of commercial wire services and its own newscenter, AFKN began to originate all of its own news

programming from Seoul.

AFKN began from scratch in October, 1950, under the worst of wartime conditions. By 1957, AFKN had become an independent network providing complete programming service to all American Armed Forces stationed in South Korea. Not bad!

FAR EAST NETWORK EXPANDS AND REORGANIZES

Meanwhile, FEN continued to evolve into a network operation in name and practice. After the closing of AFRS Saipan on April 1, 1950, FEN consisted of nine stations and five relay transmitters. Most of the stations were on the air eighteen hours a day, seven days a week. Of the 1,267 hours of programs broadcast each week, almost fifty percent came from the FEN production department or from the individual local station staffs. The other half originated from the weekly AFRS transcription package from AFRS, Los Angeles.

During 1952, the locally-produced programming ranged over a wide spectrum.⁽⁶⁾ From Kyushu, Army Corporal Fred "Fearless" Forgette aired everything from traffic safety to blood bank contributions with wit, personality and originality. From Osaka, Army Sergeant Tod "Cowboy" Clems put "Sagebrush Symphony" on the air. He enticed even hillbilly haters to his program. From Sendai, Army Master Sergeant Johnny Baker broadcast "Stories of Japan" for some six years. He became as much a part of the serviceman's experience in Japan as the hot baths and Mt. Fuji.

The core of FEN programming came out of the Headquarters in Tokyo. One of the most popular programs began in August, 1952. Co-hosted by former U.S. Navy language instructor John Sato and his friend, Army Corporal Dan Levy, the five-minute program soon had listeners greeting each other in Japanese. During this same period, Navy Journalist Ben Oldag, possibly the most versatile voice ever to broadcast over FEN, showed that the right person could do country or long-hair classical music. He could even introduce church services, all with appropriate style and equal aplomb.

Entertainment aside, FEN probably offered its greatest appeal and served its mission best through its news department. The weekly, thirty-minute documentary "News From Far East" covered significant events with on-the-spot reporting.

The Network underwent an administrative reorganization in 1951 when Major Edgar Tidwell replaced Major Jean Wood as Theater Radio Officer. On September 1, 1951, as a result of G.O. 58, Headquarters and Service Command, Far East Command, they discontinued the six separate AFRS Army units in Japan. They also abolished the position of Theater Radio Officer. Major Tidwell

became the Chief of the 8213th A.U. Far East Network Japan, which organized all radio operations under its command.

AFKN became the 8212th A.U. and FEN Okinawa became the 8104th A.U. The Information Officer of the GHQ FEC staff supervised all three of these Army units.

Under this arrangement, FEN received supply support from the depot at Camp Zama, Japan, with engineering and production support coming directly from FEN headquarters in Tokyo.

With the new organization in place, FEN began a period of stability. It settled into its task of providing service to American Forces who were now "guests" in a free and no longer occupied Japan. Meanwhile, it lent support to other AFKS operations in Korea, Okinawa, and the Philippines. During 1952, FEN opened two new stations. One started in August at Miho on the southwest coast of Honshu. A second started in October on the U.S. Marine Corps Air Facility at Iwakuni, 20 miles from Hiroshima. These new stations brought the number of FEN outlets to eight. Also during the year, FEC extended landlines from Tokyo through Nagoya and Iwakuni, to the Kyushu complex and also north to Sendai, turning FEN into a real radio network.

The change in the status of American Forces in Japan from an occupying Army to "guest" status had a profound impact on FEN. Until 1953, the network had used transmitter and studio facilities leased from Japanese radio. Under the new politics, this no longer remained feasible, so FEN constructed studio facilities for all its stations on military bases. By September 1953, FEN housed all outlets in their-own buildings. This required some changes in station locations and the addition of relay transmitters in some areas.

The Kyushu station moved to Itazuke Air Base near Fukuoka. The Osaka-Nagoya station moved to the Nagoya-Jo housing area, and Sendai to the Camp Sendai housing area. FEN Tokyo moved to new studio buildings at South Camp Drake, with the transmitter built at Momoto Village housing area. In the summer of 1954,

FEN opened a station at Niigata, although its operation didn't receive final authorization until the next year.

With Niigata on the air, FEN now had nineteen outlets -- nine stations and ten relay transmitters. FEN Iwo Jima closed in April, 1953, but FEN Okinawa continued operations, giving the network a total of twenty outlets, the largest at any time during FEN's history. One station reopened on Iwo Jima in 1954, but without official sanction.

The latter 1950s witnessed a decline in the number of outlets as the United States military consolidated and phased out its facilities.

FEN, like AFKN, continued the stalwart tradition of providing entertainment, information and news to the American defense personnel wherever they found themselves stationed in the Far East.

Soon, they'd add pictures to the sound.

NOTES - CHAPTER 17

- (1) *Pacific Stars and Stripes*, Oct. 18, 1950, page 2; Interview with Edgar Tidwell, May 26, 1983; undated AFKN histories, 1950s and 1960s. Both *Stars and Stripes* and the network histories contain significant, overt errors on dates, times and sequence of events. For example, *Stars and Stripes* gives the time of the first broadcast at 7:00 AM, while several of the histories give it as 12:41. One even says the 4th was a Sunday. The chronology uses *Stars and Stripes* as the primary source, given the closeness of the story to the events recounted.
- (2) Sergeant First Class, Doug Dubois, "Radio at War," *Stars and Stripes*, Nov. 18, 1950, p 7.
- (3) Ibid.
- (4) Ibid.
- (5) Tidwell interview; AFKN histories.
- (6) The material for the following section comes primarily from Roscoe's "Brief History of the Far East Network."